

Message

From: EPAResearchCompass [/O=EXCHANGELABS/OU=EXCHANGE ADMINISTRATIVE GROUP (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/CN=RECIPIENTS/CN=C1E8F11508674C3C954553A1129D33E5-EPARESEARCH]
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To: ORD-ALL Feds and NonFeds and RSLs [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=2c735272eef941588aefd9a05ed28823-ORD-ALL Feds and NonFeds and RSLs]
CC: Harris-Young, Dawn [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=1352e37302cf4eb78a64c69a108b46e5-Young, Dawn]; Barnett, Felicia [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=5773b45cae5142fe950861dd6146f1e9-Barnett, Felicia]; Carter, Bobbi [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=f16dcafe85fc418ebd1651be2e8ab82d-Carter, Bobbi]; Gettle, Jeaneanne [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=d8e72aa7e1894faea44006fd9f22b637-Gettle, Jeaneanne]; Taylor, Dawn [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=b984d00ec06544e498ee5d986f97047c-Taylor, Dawn]; Klinger, Adam [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=346d5466632f4967adc7169c8d2ce4fd-Klinger, Adam]; Liljegren, Jennifer [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=c7098a838cd34f75b8878571fe95d939-JLiljegr]; Pollard, Solomon [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=16cdf700f8024145847a2770b84abae3-Pollard, Solomon]; Clarage, Meredith [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=ee9504437be545489f518710a5e80e68-Clarage, Meredith]; Fan, Shirley [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=cdeba1df9599435cb7401d0a65be7cda-Sfan02]; Peffers, Mel [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=1b6116fbb41448b38b3caefc882165fe-Peffers, Melissa]; Crk, Tanja [/o=ExchangeLabs/ou=Exchange Administrative Group (FYDIBOHF23SPDLT)/cn=Recipients/cn=fccf9b9519484e8f88e90d3573253817-Tanja Crk]
Subject: Weekly Compass: January 29, 2018



Weekly Update: 1/29/2019

Welcome to the Weekly Compass, your gateway to information about recent and upcoming ORD activities. If you have ideas for the Weekly Compass, please send them to the [editors](#). To see past issues, visit [the archive](#) on ORD@work.

Weekly Note from Jennifer

ORDers- Welcome back! I know it was a long few weeks, but I am excited to get this year's work going. I would like to thank you all for your resilience during this difficult time. A special thanks to our Executive Committee members for their leadership during this time, and for the selfless service of our "excepted" and "on-call" staff who kept the lights on and sustained our basic operations and critical contracts during the shutdown. Without the dedicated service of the "excepted" and "on-call" individuals during the shutdown our facilities and vulnerable long-term experiments and research organisms would have not survived.

I know for many of you, along with the unwelcome disruption to your normal lives, the shutdown presented a financial challenge. As we discussed at today's All-Hands, OCFO is working on processing back pay as quickly as possible, and depending on your financial institution, folks should start seeing direct deposits in their accounts starting tomorrow. Thank you for your patience and service to our country. Our mission of protecting human health and the environment is crucial, and I am so glad we are back in the office this week and can focus on our important work.

See below for some photos of what your colleagues did during the furlough. *-Jennifer*

Quick Updates

- Check out page 24 in [EPA's Year in Review 2018](#) document to see some 2018 highlights from ORD including our wildfire research, PFAS research, state support, SBIR and P3.
- Nominate a Colleague for a Sammies Award by Friday, February 8, 2019. If you know of an individual or team who deserves recognition for their noteworthy and inspiring accomplishments, [please nominate them](#) for this prestigious award.
- Don't forget to [check out the open opportunities on Talent Hub!](#)
- You can read the [This Week @ EPA newsletter here](#).

Photos of the Week: How ORDers Spent the Shutdown

In the Lab:

Sharing across Scales in Citizen Science

On Friday, December 14th, the Wilson Center and the Federal Community of Practice for Crowdsourcing and Citizen Science (FedCCS) hosted an event on Sharing Across Scales in Citizen Science at the Wilson Center. OSA's Innovation Team helped organized this event which brought together citizen science and crowdsourcing leaders from government, academia, NGOs and the private sector. The Wilson Center's Alison Parker moderated a panel on the benefits of cross-scale sharing and Mary Ford from National Geographic moderated a panel about the importance of choosing scale deliberately. Check out the webcast recap [here](#).

Identifying Point of Use (POU) Drinking Water Filters Certified to Reduce Lead

SSWR's Michelle Latham and NRMRL's Darren Lytle and Mike Schock, in collaboration with the Office of Children's Health Protection and with input from the Office of Water's Lead and Copper Rule Implementation Workgroup, developed [this document](#) to help consumers better understand whether or not a filter is certified to reduce lead exposure. It was specifically designed for use by consumers to help reduce exposure to lead from drinking water consumption in areas with lead service lines and/or in homes and buildings with premise plumbing containing lead. This will help consumers increase their level of confidence in purchasing filters that have been tested by an accredited third-party certification body for lead reduction.

ORD Helps Respond to Bella Vista, Arkansas Fire

An underground fire that has been burning for more than four months in Bella Vista, Arkansas is having an impact on local air quality. The Arkansas Department of Health has indicated that air quality near the Brown's Tree Care Landfill Fire has been "unhealthy" at times. On December 13-14, NRMRL's David Carson and Thabet Tolaymat met with Region 6's On-Scene Coordinator Matt Loesel and Superfund Technical Liaison Terry Burton and visited the burning stump dump site to assess conditions and gather information. The site lies between tributaries to a nearby recreational lake, surrounding forest, and nearby homes, where the smoke is an irritant and potential danger. EPA also held meetings with the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality and Department of Health and the Bella Vista Fire Chief. NRMRL provided an assessment of ongoing management approaches and mitigation options to Region 6.

NERL's Gayle Hagler and Ron Williams are among EPA staff aiding in the response. ORD is assisting Region 6 with interpreting the data from the low-cost particulate matter sensors that reported very high readings in Bella Vista. The support included an assessment of the concentrations reported, information on the sensor technology and data reporting system and an investigation on whether any long-distance transport of fire-related smoke from other areas contributed to the local pollution levels impacted by the fire.

Technical Assistance: Hot Landfills, Columbus, OH

On December 11, NRMRL's David Carson, Thabet Tolaymat, and Max Krause (ORISE) met with the Ohio EPA Division of Materials and Waste Management as part of ongoing support for hot landfills across the state. Data interpretation and possible mitigation approaches were discussed.

Disinfection Byproducts and Corrosion Control in Drinking Water

On December 11, Ohio EPA contacted NRMRL's Darren Lytle regarding balancing concerns of corrosion control and total trihalomethanes (TTHM), a chlorine disinfection byproduct, in the drinking water in Defiance, Ohio. Defiance relies on pH adjustment for corrosion control and can, at times, experience increases in TTHMs. Darren suggested Defiance maintain its current pH levels while the City moves to add activated carbon to address TTHMs, and suggested the City consider evaluating the relationship between pH and TTHM formation.

Modeling Nitrogen Fate and Transport in Large River Basins

On November 29, *Biogeosciences* published "[Integrating multimedia models to assess nitrogen losses from the Mississippi River basin to the Gulf of Mexico](#)" by NERL's Yongping Yuan, Ellen Cooter (Retired), Limei Ran and Anna Jalowska, along with external coauthors. This paper describes the use of Community Multiscale Air Quality (CMAQ), the Weather Research and Forecasting (WRF) Model, the Environmental Policy Integrated Climate (EPIC) model, and the Soil and Water Assessment Tool (SWAT) to estimate nitrogen fate and transport in large river basins.

Relationships between Fecal Indicators and Pathogens in Recreational Waters

On December 13, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* published "[Relationships between Microbial Indicators and Pathogens in Recreational Water Settings](#)" by NERL's Asja Korajkic and Brian McMinn. In this study, the authors reviewed the scientific literature on relationships between fecal indicators and pathogens in recreational waters. The purpose was to help improve the use of fecal indicators for informing risk assessment and remediation strategies. The review revealed that while fecal indicators such as fecal indicator bacteria, alternative indicators and microbial source tracking markers continue to be suitable indicators of fecal pollution, their relationship with waterborne pathogens, particularly viruses, is tenuous and influenced by many different factors.

Relationship between U.S. Adolescent Obesity and Metabolic Dysfunction, Metabolic Syndrome

On November 23, *Annals of Epidemiology* published "[Abdominal obesity, metabolic dysfunction, and metabolic syndrome in U.S. adolescents: National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey 2011–2016](#)" by NERL's Symielle Gaston (ORISE) and Nicolle Tulve. The study used National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey data to look at Metabolic Dysfunction and Metabolic Syndrome risk factors (i.e., elevated blood pressure, triglycerides, blood glucose, and low HDL cholesterol) and their relationship to abdominal obesity among U.S. adolescents.

Grantee Publications on Links between Sugar in Breast Milk and Infant Growth and Development

The [EPA/NIEHS Children's Centers at the University of Southern California](#) recently published a study in the journal *nutrients* that looked at the forms of sugar present in infant breast milk and the infant body composition of exclusively breastfed infants. Among the sugars present in breast milk--glucose, lactose and fructose, --fructose was present at the lowest concentrations. However, fructose was found to be the only sugar significantly associated with infant body composition. Infants fed breast milk with higher fructose concentrations had higher body weights distributed across all components of body composition (i.e., lean mass, fat mass, and mass). Since human milk does not naturally contain fructose, this study was among the first to identify breast milk as a potential route of fructose transmission to young infants.

In a [subsequent publication in the journal *nutrients*](#), the same children's center evaluated the effect of consuming high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS) by lactating mothers on the composition of sugars in breast milk--using a different cohort. This study

revealed that mothers' consumption of an HFCS-sweetened beverage significantly increased concentrations of breast milk fructose with no effect on breast milk glucose or lactose. These findings highlight maternal intake of fructose-containing products as a targetable intervention for reducing exposure to fructose in early life. Together these studies support the need for further research into the effects of sugars on infant growth and development.

In the Office:

Back Pay Updates and Resources

EPA is working to pay everyone by Thursday, January 31, 2019. Employees should start seeing the first deposits as soon as Wednesday, January 30, 2019. (Depending on your financial institution's direct deposit time frames, the actual deposit dates may vary). To comply with the 2019 Government Employee Fair Treatment Act that was recently signed into law, for the first week upon the return to normal operations, OCFO will limit access to PeoplePlus. OCFO will use your agreed upon work schedule in PeoplePlus for the calculation of your payroll for the time period Saturday, December 29, 2018 to Saturday, January 19, 2019. Therefore, you do not have to do anything in PeoplePlus at this time. Back pay will also include pay for all federal holidays occurring during the shutdown.

The next scheduled pay date is Tuesday, February 12, 2019, for the pay period ending Saturday, February 2, 2019. This pay date will reflect default pay for all employees for Sunday January 20, 2019, through Saturday, February 2, 2019. PeoplePlus will be available beginning the week of February 4, 2019, for employees to make time card corrections for previous pay periods. This includes entering actual schedules for pay period three. No Earnings and Leave statement will be available for pay period two. Earning and Leave Statements for pay periods one and two will not be corrected.

As you settle back into the office, there are many resources available to you if you have any questions. In addition to talking with your supervisor, the website - www.epa.gov/2018lapse - addresses issues such as People Plus and back pay, employee counseling, annual and sick leave, retirement benefits, IT support, transit subsidy, and travel.

Enter Your FY19 First Quarter Data into TechTracker by February 15

The first quarter for Fiscal Year 2019 ended on December 31, 2018. To ensure that all FY19 first quarter data is in the system, we are asking that everyone create any remaining entries for technical support performed during the first quarter (October 1 – December 31, 2018) or add hours to existing entries as necessary for additional time spent on those tasks in that timeframe. Please have all applicable technical support hours for first quarter work entered into [TechTracker](#) by Friday, February 15. If you have any questions, please contact your [Program Support Coordinator](#) or the general [ORD TechTracker contact](#).

GSA Smartpay 3 for Travel Cardholders

All travelers should be using their NEW GSA SmartPay 3 travel card for carrying out official business while on travel. Effective January 2nd, the Agency will begin paying CitiBank directly for expenses marked for reimbursement to the "GOVCC". Examples of these expenses are: Hotel, Hotel Tax, Rental Car, and Airfare. Expenses related to the GSA SmartPay 2 card must be marked as "Personal", and payments will need to be mailed directly to JP Morgan/Chase by the cardholder. ALL Cardholders MUST create a CitiManager Account in order to view transactions or financial statements, or opt in to paper statements for the GSA SmartPay 3 card. Additional information and training on activating your GSA SmartPay 3 card (along with creating a CitiManager Account, are available on the [GSA SmartPay 3-EPA Rollout SharePoint](#) site. In the event there are technical difficulties when accessing the training, please send a message to the OCFO Financial Policy mailbox. All other questions regarding travel should be directed to the Travel Help Desk at: (513) 487-2346 or CINWD_Travel@epa.gov.

Shut down note: During the shut down Citibank realized many could not make payments so they did not age accounts as delinquent or suspended or cancelled. During this time finance charges were not being assessed; however, Statements of Account continued to be generated. You most likely did not receive a statement because during card activation you had to elect to receive paper statements. The default is paperless statements. Currently accounts can only be see on line or by calling. To sign on to you account go to <http://www.citimanager.com/login> If you have not set up you card they have self registration for card holders. You will need to have you employee #. You can find this from people plus.

New Purchase Card Order Request System

The new Purchase Card Order Request System (PCORS) is now available for use and was jointly developed with EPA's Office of Mission Support. It is designed to replace both ORD's purchase card system and OARM's SharePoint 1900-8 form. Use of PCORS is at the discretion of the purchase card holder and their approving official. Users can initiate new purchase card requests at the following location: <https://forms.epa.gov/>. It is recommended that Approvers access purchase card requests by using the link within the automated email notifications when requests are submitted. Approvers can also access PCORS at the following site: <https://epaoei.my.salesforce.com/>. Training webinars are being offered today at 1 pm ET and on Thursday at 11 am ET. See the [ORD Purchase Card Migration](#) intranet page for more information. Please email the BAP Helpdesk at BAP_PCORS_SUPPORT@epa.gov if you experience any system problems. Contact Valerie Brandon at brandon.valerie@epa.gov or Allen Johnson at johnson.allen@epa.gov if you have any questions concerning the business process.

Accolades:

Mike Slimak Receives Presidential Rank Award (PRA)

The Presidential Rank Award recognition is the most prestigious award you can receive in Federal career civil service, and is only given to only 1% of SES career employees. Sustainable and Healthy Communities NPD, Mike Slimak, received the highest level of recognition under the PRA recognizing the accomplishments during his career and specifically for leading ORD's Sustainable and Healthy Communities Research Program. The program identified a methodology for selecting community interventions that would

provide the most benefit. They also developed the Health Impact Assessment, to assess the impact of development decisions, which was endorsed by the World Health Organization.

NHEERL Scientist Appointed as a Federal Liaison to Gulf of Mexico Alliance (GOMA) Team

NHEERL ecologist, Jill Awkerman, was appointed as a federal liaison to the Wildlife and Fisheries Priority Issue Team. Led by the five U.S. Gulf States (Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas), GOMA's goal is to foster collaboration to enhance the environmental and economic health of the Gulf of Mexico. This team will work to include relevant fisheries and wildlife issues as part of GOMA's regional priority development to implement the Governors' Action Plan III, which focuses on coastal resilience, habitat resources, water resources, wildlife and fisheries, data and monitoring, and education and public engagement in Gulf States.

NHEERL Scientist To Serve on Puget Sound Partnership (PSP) Science Panel

NHEERL's Paul Mayer was selected to serve a four-year term on the PSP Science Panel, which provides expertise and advice to develop a comprehensive, science-based plan to restore the Puget Sound. The State of Washington leads the PSP collective regional effort, whose hundreds of members include governments, tribes, scientists, businesses, and nonprofit organizations.

Election to AAAS Fellow Status

NCEA's Malcolm Field was elected as a Fellow by the Council of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). Each year, the Council elects members whose "efforts on behalf of the advancement of science or its applications are scientifically or socially distinguished." Malcolm was specifically honored for "distinguished contributions to the field of groundwater contaminant tracing through fractured and soluble rock, including modeling of dispersion and mixing within contaminant plumes." The formal presentation ceremony is scheduled for Saturday, February 16th, 2019 during the Association's Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C.

In the News:

Federal Lead Action Plan Announced

On December 19, EPA, HUD and HHS unveiled a "Federal Action Plan to Reduce Childhood Lead Exposures and Associated Health Impacts" at an event at EPA HQ in Washington, DC. Developed through cross-governmental collaboration of the President's Task Force on Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks to Children (Task Force), which includes 17 federal departments and offices, the Lead Action Plan is a blueprint for reducing lead exposure and associated harms by working with a range of stakeholders, including states, tribes and local communities, along with businesses, property owners and parents. Goal 4 of the recently-released Federal Action Plan to Reduce Childhood Lead Exposures and Associated Health Impacts is to "Support and Conduct Critical Research to Inform Efforts to Reduce Lead Exposures and Related Health Risks."

"Using the Smoke Sense App During the Camp Fire in California"

The EPA Blog featured a new post by NHEERL's Wayne Cascio about his experience in Northern California during the November 2018 fires. EPA has received positive public feedback for sharing information about health risks from smoke and what people can do to protect themselves. The blog was also shared with our public health partners at other federal agencies, states, and local and health organizations.

Photos of the Week: How ORDers Spent the Shutdown

- OSP's Amy Shields, Region 7 RSL, volunteered for a breast cancer organization for uninsured patients called Bra Couture KC where she works with breast cancer survivors who will be featured in an event on April 12th. The survivors worked on painting hearts which will be at the event and highlight the event's theme called Hearts of Champions to thank the Kansas City Chiefs for all of their support to the event. Below are the paintings from the breast cancer survivors and other cancer survivors (including my twin sister). In the center, is the Special Teams coach's wife for the Kansas City Chiefs.



- On January 9th, Amy Shields, Region 7 RSL, volunteered with Rebuilding KC and local firefighters and three EPA Region 7 staff members to build a wheelchair ramp for a woman in North Kansas City, Missouri who had not left her home since early November because she was not physically able to leave her home. The woman came out and thanked the team for their hard work and the firefighters helped her walk down the ramp to her yard at the end of the day for the first time in over 50 days.



Kim Burr (EPA R7 Superfund Division, and ROCS-Net 2018), Amy Shields (R7 RSL), and Steve Schaff (EPA Region 7 Water Division, RARE team for Iowa wetland project) (Not pictured: Laura Webb (EPA Region 7 Lab and RARE HABS team))



- OSP's Carole Braverman, Region 5 RSL, took her 90 year old mother to "yappy hour" and made oatmeal walnut rolls.



- Furloughed EPA-RTP employees sorted potatoes, baby wipes, clothing, and tiny screws and nails. They labeled and boxed thousands of books that kids will get to keep, and cleaned play spaces for kids recovering from serious illnesses. They picked up trash – lots of it – along creeks that feed into area water supplies, and in the floodplain of a popular local lake. They made paper crowns, and helped build houses. They bagged and boxed food, and prepared garden beds that will provide produce to people in need. Their group efforts contributed more than 400 volunteer hours to Triangle nonprofit organizations. Many EPA employees worked at the Food Bank every week. OAQPS created a [site](#) to help organize volunteer activities in RTP, check it out for more details and photos.



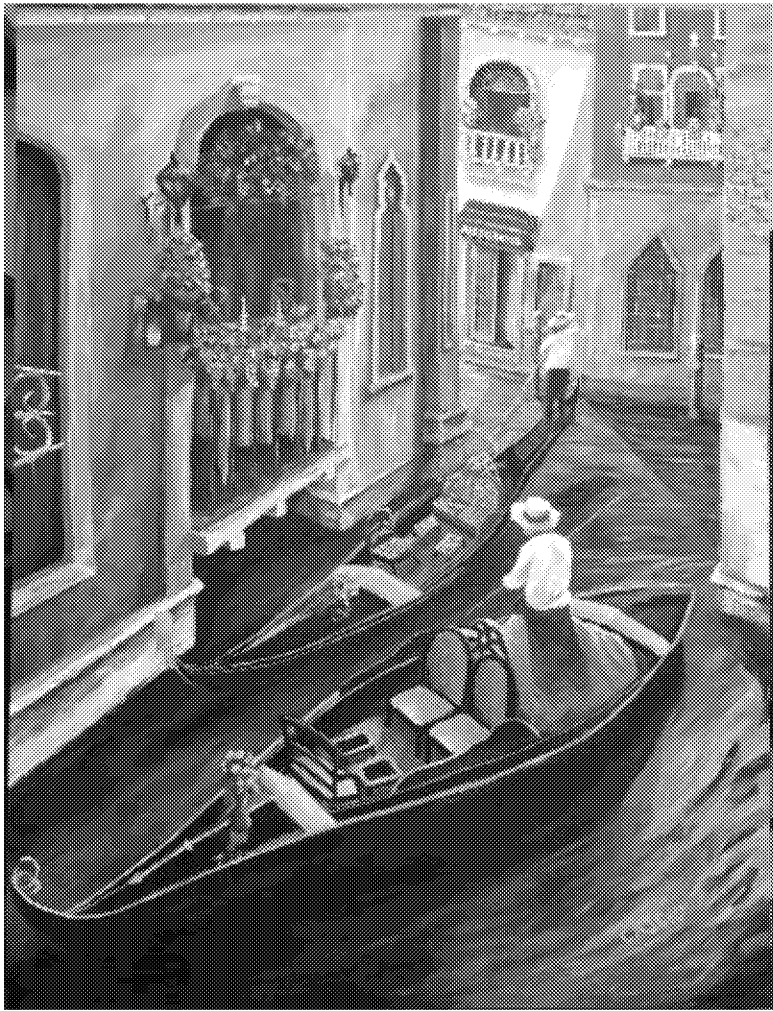
Back row: NCEA's Jennifer Richmond-Bryant, Mary Butts, Jason Sacks, Andre Weaver, Laura Carlson, Erin Yost, Michelle Angrish, Andrew Hotchkiss, Kris Thayer & Jeff Gift

Front row: David Musick (FEMA), NCEA's Anna Sacks, Michele Taylor & Janice Lee

- OSP's Kacee Deener spent some time at her favorite hiking spot – Maryland Heights – which overlooks the confluence of the Shenandoah and Potomac rivers and the town of Harpers Ferry, WV.



- NHEERL's Wayne Cascio painted a picture for someone who loves Venice, and also wrote something about what it means to him to work for ORD and be back to work.



Working for the US EPA's Office of Research and Development Has Always Felt So Right



By Wayne E. Cascio, MD, NHEERL

With the email titled, "Welcome Back" I learned the shutdown was over and I'd be returning to work on Monday. Thousands of my fellow EPA employees all over our country would also be returning to their work and our mission of protecting public health and the environment. While much of our public service was held in abeyance during the shutdown, the pause gave me time to reflect on why I find meaning in working for the Office of Research and Development and the importance of environmental quality, and recall a recent experience that helped put the value of what we do into perspective.

In late June of 2018, I had the extraordinary opportunity to travel northward from Fairbanks, Alaska along the Dalton Highway and the Trans-Alaska Pipeline; cross the Yukon River and the Brooks Range; and hike above the Arctic Circle. The accompanying photograph provides a glimpse of the splendor of this land and serves as a focal point for contemplating our place in nature, our responsibility to the ecosystems that support us, and the inherent goodness and value of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Most people with whom I've shared this photograph describe the scene as beautiful, but add that the land appears isolated, deserted, and harsh. Yet, their descriptions differ so dramatically to my own reactions while present in these extraordinary surroundings. Alaska's interior offered indescribable grandeur as far as the eyes could see. The experience embodied the harmony between the animate and inanimate; conveying a peaceful accord among the sky, the clouds, the mountains, the water, the tundra, and the many living communities that the land has birthed and supported for millennia. The vastness of space, and the breadth of the panorama was overwhelming. Instead of isolation, I felt oneness with nature, unimaginable freedom, and an appreciation for the interdependencies

of the organisms living in this fragile ecosystem. The experience also underscored my appreciation for the importance of scientific investigation of these interdependencies and the vulnerability of ecosystems to chemical and non-chemical stresses.

So, what accounts for such differences between the description of my experience when compared to others looking at a photograph of this scene? The obvious and most germane reason is that even the most well composed photograph will never capture the feeling of actually being present in such a place. Yet, there is also another explanation worth consideration that likely has some impact on attitudes towards conservation, environmentalism and public opinion about the US EPA. It's very likely, that people today don't feel as connected to their natural environment as when most of our population lived in the country and worked the land to subsist. Our modern lifestyle and urbanization detach us from the natural world, thereby challenging our capacity to know the complexities of the web of life, or the health benefits of a healthy environment. Most Americans, in fact, are supportive of environmental issues, yet only a small percentage make a regular effort to preserve the environment in which they live.

Nevertheless, scientists, administrators, support staff, and students at ORD are on the job every day working to preserve or recapture the value of the environment. Through the study of the complex interrelationships between humans and the ecosystems that support us, we are learning about the health benefits of closer relationships to the natural environment, how chemical and non-chemical stressors upset this relationship and lead to disease, and how we can restore and revitalize environments in need of remediation. ORD's outreach is increasing environmental literacy and is contributing information that is critically important to helping states and communities make better decisions and meeting the Agency's mission to protect the environment and public health, and motivating individuals to be more mindful of their environment.

As a medical doctor, I learned early in my career that the latest medical breakthrough, innovative technology or medication contributed very little to the overall health of the community I served. And while individual decisions such as modifying health risk factors helped, community characteristics, namely socioeconomic and environmental conditions, played a far greater role in determining health and clinical outcomes of my patients. It was that observation that ultimately motivated me to leave clinical medicine to join the EPA as an environmental health scientist. Now as the Director of NHEERL overseeing the operations of both health and ecology divisions, I've come to learn in more detail the interdependencies within ecosystems that determine health for both people and other living organisms. More and more research studies conducted by scientists in and outside of ORD highlight the value of human interaction with nature, support preserving the quality of the environment, and promoting greater engagement of the public with nature to improve population health. As such, the US EPA is an important public health organization on par with our most well-known and respected public health agencies.

The photograph you see here represents just a fraction of the grandeur of the natural world, yet it will now always serve as an inspiration for contemplation of my place within our world and our collective responsibility to be good stewards. We have the privilege to reap nature's benefits, and in return we have the responsibility to show our gratitude for those benefits by respecting our environment. The US EPA stands as a valued American institution, keeping our Nation's focus on meeting this responsibility so that future generations can share in Nature's bounty. To be a part of an organization with such a noble mission is enormously fulfilling and has always felt right. It's great to be back on the job!

- ORD locations held welcome back receptions yesterday morning, below is a photo from Cincinnati's event.

